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General Assembly

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105th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 6 July 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki ..... (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The President: This afternoon, the General Assembly will hear an address by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her visit to the United Nations.

Allow me now to make a brief statement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

On behalf of the Member States of the United Nations, allow me to extend our warmest welcome to Her Majesty on her first visit to the United Nations since 1957. We are delighted to have her here with us on this momentous occasion and we are honoured to hear her address the General Assembly today.

As Queen of the United Kingdom and 15 other countries, and as head of the Commonwealth of Nations comprised of 54 member countries, she represents over 2 billion people, from Asia and the Pacific to Africa and from the Americas and the Caribbean to the British Isles. Her Majesty embodies the globalized world and shared humanity that also define the United Nations and give it purpose.

When she last addressed the United Nations 53 years ago, the world was rebuilding from a devastating world war. Cold war tensions and nuclear annihilation threatened the existence of all humankind. Equality and non-discrimination were still unrealized and women were expected to stay at home. Since that occasion, she has presided over a remarkable global transformation that saw the birth of a multitude of independent nation-States based on the principles of equal rights and the self-determination of all peoples that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

We now live in a world where upheaval and change are the norm and the pace of change has quickened. While there has been unprecedented economic prosperity, the world remains blighted by extreme levels of inequality, with billions of people living in absolute poverty. Natural disasters occur more frequently and with greater devastation, while new threats and pressures have also emerged. When such disasters and tragedies force us to confront our human frailty, Her Majesty has lifted the spirits of those in shock, letting them know that they were not alone in their suffering. And in times of horror following acts of terrorism, her words of comfort and her steadfast presence in the face of uncertainty have brought solace and reassurance.

We at the United Nations are focused on making the world a better place, standing up for justice and peace, relieving suffering and helping the poor to lift themselves out of poverty. We often come up short and do not live up to our commitments or meet the expectations that are laid upon us. Through Her Majesty's sense of duty and tireless public service, she has demonstrated to those of us at the United Nations that we must not waver from our purpose and that we must remain steadfast in our will and determination because the poor, the disadvantaged and the weak do not have the luxury of our failure. That is our ideal and we must live up to it.

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I now give the floor to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: We are honoured by Her Majesty's presence. In a changing and churning world, she is an anchor for our age. Her reign spans the decades, from the challenges of the cold war to the threat of global warming; from the Beatles to Beckham and from television to Twitter. Throughout the years, she has travelled the world and met its people. She has become a living symbol of grace, constancy and dignity.

In 1957, she first visited this Hall when the United Nations was still young (see A/PV.707). Over half a century ago, she told the General Assembly that the future would be shaped by more than the formal bonds that unite us; it would be shaped by the strength of our devotion to the hopes and great ideals of the Charter of the United Nations: peace, justice and prosperity.

With Her Majesty at the helm, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth have contributed immensely to the United Nations. Today, the four largest providers of United Nations peacekeeping troops are Commonwealth countries. Around the world, she is working with us to foster development, advance human rights and promote global security.

In September, we will gather to advance that mission further still by pushing for progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. That is the blueprint of the world's leaders to save the lives of the poor and vulnerable, to combat hunger and disease, to promote gender equality and to provide education, opportunity and decent work to billions of people. We will once again heed Her Majesty's call and devote our full strength to the ideals of the Charter and to realizing a better world for all.

For her dedication to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth and to the United Nations and our common values, we say thank you and welcome. We wish her continued good health and we are happy to have her here today.

The President: I now have the honour to invite Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to address the General Assembly.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: I believe I was last here in 1957. Since then, I have travelled widely and met many leaders, ambassadors and statesmen from around the world. I address the General Assembly today as Queen of 16 United Nations Member States and as head of the Commonwealth of 54 countries.

I have also witnessed great change, much of it for the better, particularly in science and technology and in social attitudes. Remarkably, many of these sweeping advances have come about not because of Governments, committee resolutions or central directives — although all these have played a part — but instead because millions of people around the world have wanted them. For the United Nations, these subtle yet significant changes in people's approach to leadership and power might have foreshadowed failure and demise. Instead, the United Nations has grown and prospered by responding and adapting to these shifts.

But also, many important things have not changed. The aims and values which inspired the United Nations Charter endure: to promote international peace, security and justice; to relieve and remove the blight of hunger, poverty and disease; and to protect the rights and liberties of every citizen.

The achievements of the United Nations are remarkable. When I was first here, there were just three United Nations operations overseas; now, over 120,000 men and women are deployed in 26 missions across the world. The Organization has helped to reduce conflict, it has offered humanitarian assistance to millions of people affected by natural disasters and other emergencies, and it has been deeply committed to tackling the effects of poverty in many parts of the world.

But so much remains to be done. Former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld once said that constant attention by a good nurse may be just as important as a major operation by a surgeon. Good nurses get better with practice; sadly, the supply of patients never ceases.

This September, leaders will meet to agree on how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, when each nation will have its own distinctive contribution to make. New challenges have also emerged which have tested this Organization as much as its Member States. One such is the struggle against terrorism. Another challenge is climate change, where careful account must be taken of the risks faced by smaller, more vulnerable nations, many of them from the Commonwealth.

I started by talking about leadership. I have much admiration for those who have the talent to lead, particularly in public service and in diplomatic life. I congratulate you, Mr. President, your colleagues and your predecessors on your many achievements.

It has perhaps always been the case that the waging of peace is the hardest form of leadership of all. I know of no single formula for success, but over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration to work together.

Since I addressed the General Assembly last, the Commonwealth, too, has grown vigorously to become a group of nations representing nearly 2 billion people. It gives its wholehearted support to the significant contributions to the peace and stability of the world made by the United Nations and its agencies. Last November, when I opened the Commonwealth heads of Government meeting in Trinidad and Tobago, I told the delegates that the Commonwealth had the opportunity to lead. Today, I offer the United Nations the same message.

For over six decades, the United Nations has helped to shape the international response to global dangers. The challenge now is to continue to show this clear and convening leadership while not losing sight of the Organization's ongoing work to secure the security, prosperity and dignity of our fellow human beings.

When people 53 years from now look back on us, they will doubtless view many of our practices as old-fashioned. But it is my hope that, when judged by future generations, our sincerity, our willingness to take a lead and our determination to do the right thing will stand the test of time.

In my lifetime, the United Nations has moved from being a high-minded aspiration to being a real force for common good. That of itself has been a signal achievement. But we are not gathered here to reminisce. In tomorrow's world, we must all work together as hard as ever if we are truly to be united nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to express our deep appreciation to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for her important and inspiring address.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.